



Highlights of [GAO-04-343SP](#).

## Why GAO Convened This Forum

As we face the challenges of the 21st century, the federal government must strive to build high-performing organizations. Nothing less than a fundamental transformation in the people, processes, technology, and environment used by federal agencies to address public goals will be necessary to address public needs. In high-performing organizations, management controls, processes, practices, and systems are adopted that are consistent with prevailing best practices and contribute to concrete organizational results. Ultimately, however, the federal government needs to change its culture to become more results-oriented, client- and customer-focused, and collaborative in nature.

On November 6, 2003, GAO hosted a forum to discuss what it means for a federal agency to be high-performing in an environment where results and outcomes are increasingly accomplished through partnerships that cut across different levels of government and different sectors of the economy. The forum included discussions of the metrics, means, and mechanisms that a federal agency should use to optimize its influence and contribution to nationally important results and outcomes. The forum included representatives of the public, not-for-profit, and for-profit sectors as well as academia who are knowledgeable of what it takes for organizations to become high-performing.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-343SP](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-343SP).

To view the full product click on the link above. For more information, contact J. Christopher Mihm, Managing Director, Strategic Issues on (202) 512-6806 or [mihmj@gao.gov](mailto:mihmj@gao.gov).

## HIGHLIGHTS OF A GAO FORUM

# High-Performing Organizations: Metrics, Means, and Mechanisms for Achieving High Performance in the 21st Century Public Management Environment

## What Participants Said

There was broad agreement among participants at the forum on the key characteristics and capabilities of high-performing organizations, which comprise four themes as follows:

- **A clear, well-articulated, and compelling mission.** High-performing organizations have a clear, well-articulated, and compelling mission, the strategic goals to achieve it, and a performance management system that aligns with these goals to show employees how their performance can contribute to overall organizational results.
- **Strategic use of partnerships.** Since the federal government is increasingly reliant on partners to achieve its outcomes, becoming a high-performing organization requires that federal agencies effectively manage relationships with other organizations outside of their direct control.
- **Focus on needs of clients and customers.** Serving the needs of clients and customers involves identifying their needs, striving to meet them, measuring performance, and publicly reporting on progress to help assure appropriate transparency and accountability.
- **Strategic management of people.** Most high-performing organizations have strong, charismatic, visionary, and sustained leadership, the capability to identify what skills and competencies the employees and the organization need, and other key characteristics including effective recruiting, comprehensive training and development, retention of high-performing employees, and a streamlined hiring process.

During the forum, the Comptroller General offered several options that the Congress, the executive branch, and others could pursue to facilitate transformation and to achieve high performance in the federal government. Several of the participants provided their views and experiences with these options. These options included:

- establishing a governmentwide transformation fund where federal agencies could apply for funds to make short-term targeted investments, based on a well-developed business case;
- employing the Chief Operating Officer concept or establishing a related senior management position, such as a Principal Under Secretary for Management and/or Chief Administrative Officer, to provide long-term attention and focus on management issues and transformational change at selected federal agencies; and
- examining certain federal budget reforms, such as a biennial budget process, which could encourage the Congress and federal agencies to focus on long-range issues and possibly provide more time for oversight of existing government programs, policies, functions, and activities.